A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

CHAPEL

IN

GREAT QUEEN-STREET, LINCOLN's-INN-FIELDS,

On *SUNDAY*, MARCH 20, 1774,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF

Unfortunate Perſons confined for Small Debts.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

By THOMAS FRANCKLIN, D.D.

MINISTER OF QUEEN-STREET CHAPEL,

AND CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY.

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At a General Quarterly Meeting of THE SOCIETY FOR THE DISCHARGE AND RELIEF OF PERSONS IMPRISON'D FOR SMALL DEBTS,

Craven-Street, April 6, 1774.

RESOLVED,

THAT *the Thanks of this* SOCIETY *be given to the Reverend Doctor* FRANCKLIN, *for his Sermon, recommending this* CHARITY, *and that he be requested to* PRINT *it.*

L. D. NELME, *Sec.*

TO THE

RIGHT HON. LORD ROMNEY, PRESIDENT,

RT. HON. LORD CHIEF BARON SMYTHE,
RIGHT HON. LORD BEAUCHAMP,
HON. MR. JUSTICE NARES, AND
JOHN THORNTON, ESQ. } VICE-PRESIDENTS.

MR. JAMES NEILD, TREASURER,

And the reſt of the GOVERNORS of, and SUBSCRIBERS to,

THE

CHARITY

FOR THE

Diſcharge and Relief of Perſons Impriſoned for Small Debts,

THIS

SERMON

Written, Preached, and Publiſhed, at their Deſire,

Is, with all due Reſpect,

INSCRIBED,

By their obedient,

Humble Servant,

THOMAS FRANCKLIN.

Great Queen-ſtreet,
Lincoln's-Inn-Fields,
April 14, 1774.

A

SERMON.

O THOU WICKED SERVANT, I FORGAVE THEE ALL THAT DEBT, BECAUSE THOU DESIRED'ST ME: SHOULD'ST NOT THOU ALSO HAVE HAD COMPASSION ON THY FELLOW-SERVANT, EVEN AS I HAD PITY ON THEE?

MATT. xviii. V. 32, 33.

WHEN we ſeriouſly conſider the frail, corrupt, and diſtruſtful ſtate of human nature, when we reflect on the general lot and portion of mortality; when we call to mind how few things there are in this life which can impart real and ſubſtantial happineſs; and, on the other hand, how many are pregnant with miſery and ſorrow, we are naturally led to imagine, that it muſt be the buſineſs as it is the intereſt and concern of every individual to lighten as much as poſſible the general burthen: That every office of tenderneſs and humanity to our fellow-creatures would of courſe be duely and punctually performed by every one of us; well-knowing that all the poor aid and

aſſiſtance

aſſiſtance which each particular could lend, would ſtill afford but ſmall and inſignificant preſervatives againſt univerſal affliction and calamity; as the moſt that we can do is but to ſoften that diſtreſs which we cannot prevent, and to ſooth thoſe ſorrows which we cannot remove.

And yet the general conduct and behaviour of mankind is directly contrary: It is indeed a melancholy truth, that for the moſt part we employ our wit and ſagacity but to over reach, our ingenuity to torment, our riches and power to perſecute and oppreſs each other.

In the parable now before us, our bleſſed Saviour, who applied it ſolely to the purpoſe of inculcating mutual love, charity, and forgiveneſs, informs us, that the benevolent king had generouſly, on the humble petition of the poor inſolvent, withdrawn his juſt claim to the whole debt, which was no leſs than ten thouſand talents; and yet this very ſervant would not afterwards forgive his fellow-ſervant one hundred pence, though moſt earneſtly ſolicited by him, but caſt him into priſon: Then it was, ſays our Saviour, that his lord called him, and ſaid unto him, *O thou wicked ſervant, I forgave thee all that debt, becauſe thou deſired'ſt me: Should'ſt not thou alſo have had compaſſion on thy fellow-ſervant, even as I had pity on thee?* The conſequence of this cruel and inhuman treatment of his unhappy brother was ſuch, we are told, as the offender well deſerved: *His lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he ſhould pay all that was due unto him.* The behaviour of the king's ſervant on this occaſion, as related by our bleſſed Saviour, was not, we have reaſon to ſuppoſe, recorded by him as any thing ſingular or remarkable, but as a circumſtance that had frequently happened in times paſt, and probably would but too often happen alſo in times to come; he well knew and foreſaw that the ſame unforgiving temper and diſpoſition, the ſame rancorous malevolence and inhumanity which had actuated the mind of one man,

might

might afterwards corrupt the breaſts, and influence the conduct, of thouſands; and of this there have been but too many evident proofs, in every age and nation, from the days of our Saviour and his Apoſtles even unto our own.

For the honour of that nature which we partake of, for the intereſt and advancement of that virtue which we admire, and that holy religion which we profeſs, moſt ſeriouſly and devoutly it were to be wiſhed that ſome method cou'd be found out effectually to preſerve and ſecure the property of individuals, without ſacrificing the liberty of one man to the arbitrary will or caprice, the anger and reſentment, the oppreſſion and inſenſibility of another: But human laws muſt partake of human imperfections: even in the moſt poliſhed and refined nations, (for the grievance is by no means confined to our own) puniſhments are often inflicted which are very inadequate to the crimes committed; and this is doubtleſs a hardſhip, more particularly to be lamented with regard to the *Inſolvent Debtor*.

The cruel confinement of a loathſome dungeon, with all the horrors generally attendant on it, is doubtleſs by far too ſevere a ſentence on the unhappy delinquent; to be cut off at once from all the comforts and conveniencies of life, to be ſeparated, perhaps by brutal force and violence, from all that he holds dear, to be deprived of light and air, the common benefits of nature, is ſurely a dreadful and melancholy tranſition; even when his incapacity of diſcharging the debt is the conſequence of imprudence, folly and extravagance; how much more pitiable is his condition when it ſprings from unavoidable poverty and misfortune, from a total inability of providing for the exigencies of nature, and the neceſſities of human life! Perhaps even ſometimes, and it is a circumſtance not uncommon, from the baſeneſs, fraud or impoſture of thoſe with whom he is connected, who take advantage of his eaſy nature to delude and impoſe upon him: how many have been immured for

their

their whole lives in a priſon, from their imprudent readineſs and alacrity in ſerving thoſe whom they moſt lov'd and eſteem'd, by becoming ſurities for their friends and relations! how many have procured the peace, happineſs and liberty of others, at the dear expenſe of their own!

When we add to this, what muſt frequently be the caſe, that the unhappy ſufferer is burthen'd with a numerous and helpleſs family, that the tree which is thus blaſted is at the ſame time bent down with the weight of its own branches; when the innocent are thus inevitably involv'd in the ſame puniſhment with the guilty, when at the very criſis that the wretched parent wou'd moſt wiſh for the power to aſſiſt his children, he is deprived of every means to ſupport them, when the fountain of induſtry, that only ſource from whence the waters of comfort cou'd flow, is dried up in a barren wilderneſs, how doth the melancholy ſcene ſwell with complicated miſery! In this dreadful ſituation he is left, delivered over, as the king's ſervant was, to the tormentors; confined perhaps within the ſame walls, fed with the ſame ſcanty pittance, and doom'd to the ſame ignominous treatment as the ruffian, the felon and the murderer. *Their* fate, indeed, is more eligible than *his*, guilt alone excepted; their confinement is ſhort and determined, and death is ready, like a kind friend, to finiſh their days and their miſeries together; whilſt the unhappy debtor, who languiſhes for years in a dark and dreary dungeon, dies a lingering death, and drags on a wretched being, in lengthen'd ſhame and protracted miſery.

When indeed we conſider the variety of evils ariſing to individuals, as well as the many inconveniencies felt by the community from this ſingle circumſtance, we are utterly at a loſs to account for the ſmall degree of attention which hath hitherto been paid to it; more eſpecially when we call to mind that there is ſcarce any ſpecies of diſtreſs, which the benevolence of this charitable age and nation hath

not

not already endeavoured to relinquish or remove, we cannot but wonder that amidst all the complaints brought to the ears of the great, the *sorrowful sighing of the prisoners* did not sooner *come before them*; that, where there are so many good *Samaritans*, these *wounds* were not *bound up* and *healed*. The only probable cause to be assigned, perhaps, is, that what we ourselves do neither see nor feel is seldom the object of our enquiry or consideration; the cries of poverty are every day heard, bodily pains and diseases, accidents, and misfortunes of various kinds are frequently seen, and sometimes experienced by persons of the highest rank and fortune; these therefore the hand of charity hath been stretched forth to soften and relieve; but few, very few amongst the rich and great, have followed the unhappy debtor into his captivity, or visited those mansions of grief and sorrow which he is doom'd to inhabit; the evil which was not generally known, could not be generally attended to, nor could it be expected that the afflictions and calamities which were not seen, could be so speedily or so effectually removed.

The time, however, is at length come, thanks to the great inspirer of every good word and work, when the groans of the oppressed captive have reached the ears of the merciful, and pierced the hearts of the benevolent. To take away that reproach of carelessness and inattention which I just now mentioned, to counteract the malevolence of some, the hardness of heart and insensibility of others, to free the captive and save the wretched; for these noble and truly glorious purposes, was framed that humane and truly excellent institution which we this day meet to encourage and support; a laudable and generous design which calls for our warmest zeal to recommend, and merits our heartiest endeavours towards the furtherance and improvement of it.

Already hath this our age and nation been sufficiently distinguished by its numerous acts of goodness and beneficence: as the many schools,

hoſpitals and foundations in it do moſt abundantly teſtify; There wanted, as it were, but this one wing to finiſh and complete the great temple of Charity; that ſuperb and magnificent ſtructure which will immortalize our name, and tranſmit Britiſh compaſſion and humanity to the admiration of future ages. With regard to the particular inſtitution I am here to recommend, whether we conſider the benefits reſulting from this charity to individuals, or the advantages that will ariſe to ſociety, whether we conſider it as diſpenſing private happineſs or promoting public utility, a more truly pious and uſeful work, the good, the benevolent and the charitable could never be engaged in.

The diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of this excellent plan, and which ſeems to gild it with a ſuperior luſtre, is, that it is at once an act both of juſtice and of mercy; whilſt it imparts its welcome bounties to the unfortunate *debtor*, it ſatisfies the legal claims of the *creditor* alſo: Whilſt the light ſtrikes upon, and is directed to, one object, the reflection as it were illuminates another; it not only, as common flowers in the garden of Charity, delights the ſenſe by the grateful odour peculiar to it, but, like the perfumes of the Eaſt, diffuſes ſweetneſs and fragrance on every ſide of it; not only doth the unhappy priſoner recover his freedom when aſſiſted by us, but whenever it happens, as it frequently doth, that, on a ſtrict and careful inveſtigation of every circumſtance, the creditor is himſelf found to be in an indigent and diſtreſsful condition, the whole debt is generouſly diſcharged; thus the relief of *one* is made ſubſervient to the happineſs of *both*, and the bleſſing is doubled by the mutual participation of it.

But, moreover, whilſt this excellent Charity is ſo inſtrumental to private relief, it isno leſs ſubſervient to the public welfare: The want of hands in every branch of commerce and manufacture is every day felt and lamented by us; and yet we ſuffer numbers of the moſt able and vigorous to waſte away their youth and ſtrength in a priſon, where, like withered

boughs

boughs, they are *hewed down*, as it were, and *caſt into the fire*: How meritorious then, how praiſe-worthy is that benevolence which reſtores theſe uſeful members to ſociety, which enables them once more to exert their powers and abilities in their ſeveral callings and profeſſions, and to become profitable ſervants of that community to which they belong: *When thus we caſt our bread upon the waters, after* not many *days it returneth unto us.*

In oppoſition to this humane and benevolent inſtitution (and where is that good work which hath not met with oppoſition) it hath been ſuggeſted by ſome, that it may afford encouragement to the idle and unprincipled to contract ſuch debts as will thus kindly be diſcharged for them; that the relief thus conſtantly adminiſtered, will diminiſh the apprehenſions and leſſen the terrors of a priſon, and conſequently render men more careleſs of their behaviour; that it even lays itſelf open to fraud and colluſion between the vicious and immoral, and that debtor and creditor may connive together to ſhare the advantages reſulting from theſe charitable donations: But theſe are falſe, weak and ill-grounded ſuggeſtions, which every day's experience, ſince the inſtitution of this charity, hath enabled us to gainſay and confute. It is impoſſible, perhaps, for human wiſdom to guard againſt all the arts which may be practiſed by the cunning and deceitful to counteract its benevolent purpoſes: Every caution, however, I will venture to aſſert, hath been made uſe of to prevent fraud and impoſture, and in the relief of objects the ſtricteſt attention always paid, and the fulleſt bounty always beſtowed on thoſe who were moſt deſerving of it. It is very eaſy for men of affluent fortunes, who never felt the griping hand of penury, to boaſt of their punctual and regular diſcharge of every juſt and legal demand upon them, and no leſs eaſy

is it for ſuch (as is too often the caſe) to deal forth liberal invectives againſt the wretched inſolvent, who is deficient in that duty which they have ſo conſtantly performed; but little, alas! do they conſider what the ruthleſs command of that tyrant Neceſſity might have obliged them to; little do they reflect how hard the ſtruggle may ſometimes prove in the honeſt and conſcientious mind, between the powerful plea of preſſing indigence, and the ſtinging reproaches of forfeited juſtice and integrity.

On the moſt ſtrict and candid examination into the merits of thoſe who are intitled to the aſſiſtance of this charity, it muſt be acknowledged, to the honour of human nature, that amongſt all the miſerable objects confined in the walls of a priſon, many are indebted for their wretched ſituation there, to unavoidable misfortune; many to venial errors, folly and imprudence; many, moſt of them indeed, to the cruel and unfeeling diſpoſition of their mercileſs creditors; but few, very few, to what is too often aſcribed as the cauſe of it, a total want of principle and common honeſty: This heighth of depravity and corruption, to ſay the truth, is generally the portion of thoſe who figure in higher life, of thoſe, who, though they have never been condemned to *ſuffer* the miſeries of a priſon, have notwithſtanding moſt amply *deſerved* it.

Our laws, we know, have been ſaid (and there is perhaps but too much truth in the compariſon) to reſemble thoſe nets or toils which entangle the ſmaller beaſts of prey, but are at the ſame time too weak and feeble to hold faſt the ſtrong and powerful which are driven into them: How elſe, indeed, could it happen, that the poor, deſtitute and friendleſs Inſolvent Debtor is torn to pieces by the cruel fangs of juſtice,

juſtice, that he ſuffers all the rigor which an unrelenting creditor can inflict upon him, for a ſmall and inconſiderable debt; whilſt the inſolent and fraudful bankrupt, who has ruin'd thouſands, ſhall ſtalk in open day-light untouch'd and unabaſh'd, laugh at his oppreſſed, helpleſs creditors, and bid defiance to law, juſtice, and humanity.

But let us leave theſe infamous plunderers to what is worſe than priſons or death, the reproaches of their own conſcience; to thoſe *tormentors* let us deliver them, and turn our eyes towards objects far more deſerving of our attention; towards the meek and humble, the ſober and the diffident, the wretched and the oppreſſed, who ſtretch out their hands to us for ſuccour, and pray unto us for light and liberty: Thoſe, alas! who are poſſeſſed of this glorious treaſure, ſeem, as it were, inſenſible of its worth; and the true value of this, as of almoſt every other bleſſing, is ſeldom known 'till we feel the want of it; it is ſcarce credible, my brethren, to how many, in ſo ſhort a time, we have already, by means of this excellent inſtitution, been able to diſpenſe this great and noble gift; but true Charity, like true beauty, to be admired need but to be ſeen, the cloſer it is examined and with the nicer ſcrutiny it is enquired into, the more lovers and followers will it always attract: It will not ſurpriſe you, therefore, but it will give you infinite pleaſure to hear, that within the ſhort ſpace of twelve months laſt paſt, upwards of twelve thouſand pounds hath already been paid or compounded for from the benefactions of this Society; whole families reſcued from want, miſery and deſpair, and a number of uſeful and induſtrious members reſtored to the community. Muſt it not, my brethren, expand your hearts with benevolent chearfulneſs, to reflect that you have ſpred joy and happineſs over the minds of ſo many of your fellow-creatures? are you not thus amply

repaid for all the trouble of your ſolicitous enquiries, for all the expenſe of your collections, and all your labour in the diſtribution of them?

The power of life and death is doubtleſs a truely great and noble, and therefore a *Royal* prerogative; and yours, my brethren, who contribute to this charity, deſerves the next place in honour and dignity: To diſpenſe the greateſt bleſſing of this life to our fellow-creatures, is almoſt as diſtinguiſhing a privilege as to prolong life itſelf, which indeed without this is ſcarce worthy of our acceptance. By contributing to this excellent charity, by taking upon you, my brethren, this kind, this benevolent, this pious office, you reſemble a ſuperior order of beings; you reſemble, in the nobleſt of their perfections, thoſe miniſters of the Almighty, the holy angels of God, who came to deliver his choſen Apoſtle from captivity: as ſoon as you enter into the gloomy regions of ſlavery, the darkneſs gradually recedeth from them, the *light ſhineth in the priſon*, the iron doors open of their own accord, and you ſay to the wretched and deſpairing captive, who looks with wonder and aſtoniſhment upon you, as the Angel did unto Peter: *Gird thyſelf, and bind on thy ſandals, caſt thy garment about thee, and follow* US.

Upon the whole then, in whatever light we view this amiable inſtitution, which ever ſide of the building we turn towards us, it ſtrikes us with freſh pleaſure, and riſes upon uswith redoubled luſtre: Shall we not endeavour then to reſt it on a firm and ſolid foundation? Many miſerable and diſtreſsful objects have already been relieved; but more, many more, are every day and every hour appealing to our compaſſion, and ſoliciting our bounty; ſhall we not liſten to the cries of the poor, and hear the voice of the oppreſſed?

Let

Let us then, my brethren, like the * Roman conqueror of old, think nothing yet *done*, whilſt any thing remaineth *undone*; any thing at leaſt which it is in our power to perform. Thoſe who are bleſſed with affluence, health, and proſperity, are bound by every tie of gratitude to conſider the wants and ſorrows of the ſick and needy; and thoſe who enjoy the bleſſings of eaſe and freedom, ſhould look with an eye of tenderneſs and compaſſion on the pains and miſeries of captivity.

Conſider then, my brethren, I beſeech you, the wretched condition of the unfortunate debtor, more particularly, my beloved, conſider and reflect upon it at this ‡ genial, fertile, and benignant ſeaſon, when every ray of light diffuſeth joy and gladneſs, when every gale is impregnated with health and pleaſure; at ſuch a time ſhall we not caſt a thought towards the poor confined priſoner, ſhut up from that refreſhing air which we breath, and deprived of that reviving light which we rejoice in; ſhall we not willingly abridge ourſelves of any little ſuperfluous ſenſual gratification to promote a fellow-creature's freedom, to communicate that pleaſure which we poſſeſs, to impart that happineſs which we ourſelves enjoy.

This, my brethren, is, as it were, the laſt, the youngeſt offspring of Britiſh Charity, let us treat it as a darling favorite, nouriſh it with more than ordinary tenderneſs, and foſter it with peculiar care; if from the amazing growth and improvement of its infant ſtate, we may judge of its future ſize and perfection, it will riſe to a noble height, when arrived at its maturity.

Hereafter

* Nil actum reputans ſi quid ſupereſſet agendum.

‡ This Sermon was preach'd when the weather was remarkably fine.

Hereafter we truſt, (and may the obſervation be prophetic!) it will riſe *in ſtature, and grow in favour with God and man:* This little rivulet, ſhall one day ſwell into a wide and copious ſtream, that ſhall diffuſe plenty and proſperity on every ſide of it: It ſhall *abound like Euphrates, and like Jordan in the time of Harveſt*; this *grain of muſtard-ſeed*, to conclude with the image made uſe of by our bleſſed Saviour himſelf, which at preſent, indeed, is the *leaſt of all ſeeds*, ſhall one day be the *greateſt among herbs, and become a tree, ſo that the birds of the air ſhall come and lodge in the branches thereof.*

Which God of his infinite mercy grant; to whom, &c.

F I N I S.

Debtor.

The GENERAL STATE *of the* ACCOUNT *for the* DISCHARGE *and* RELIEF *of Perſons impriſoned for* SMALL DEBTS.

From the Commencement of the Inſtitution, the 23d *February*, 1772, to the 30th *March*, 1774.

		£.	s.	d.
1772.				
Feb. 23.	To the Rev. Dr. *Dodd*, collected at *Charlotte-Street* and *Bedford Chapels* — — — — —	81	1	0
May 27.	To Benefactions in three Months — —	326	12	0
Aug. 12.	To Ditto — — — — —	194	5	6
Nov. 25.	To Ditto — — — — —	131	13	3
Dec. 30.	To Ditto in one Month — — —	287	7	0
1773.				
March 31.	To Ditto in three Months — —	1606	13	1
June 30.	To Ditto — — — —	562	2	4
Sept. 29.	To Ditto — — — —	328	7	6
Dec. 31.	To Ditto — — — —	636	15	0
1774.				
March 30.	To Ditto — — —	639	5	6
	Annual Benefactions — —	140	14	0
		4934	16	2

Diſcharged from the Gatehouſe	92		Brought over	1500
King's Bench —	90		Newgate — —	150
New Gaol —	11		Fleet — —	54
Marſhalſea —	499		Norwich — —	5
Borough Compter —	317		Horſham — —	1
St. Catherine —	6		Ipſwich — —	7
Whitechapel —	162		Briſtol — —	1
Ludgate —	17		Birmingham —	1
Poultry Compter —	115		Maidſtone — —	2
Wood-ſtreet Compter	191		Dover — —	1
Carried over	1500			1722

per Contra. Creditor.

		Debtors.	Wives.	Children.	£.	s.	d.
1772.							
March 11.	By the Diſcharge of	34	---	---	81	1	0
May 27.	By — Ditto	81	50	143	222	16	2
Aug. 12.	By — Ditto	121	68	131	292	12	10
Nov. 25.	By — Ditto	58	32	94	141	18	3
Dec. 31.	By — Ditto	118	68	177	235	0	11
1773.							
March 31.	By — Ditto	472	324	837	1677	10	5
June 30.	By — Ditto	225	165	471	540	1	10
Sept. 30.	By — Ditto	159	97	263	356	5	7
Dec. 31.	By — Ditto	262	155	497	603	2	5
1774.							
March 30.	By — Ditto	192	131	389	472	7	8
		1722	1090	3002	4622	17	1
	Balance —				311	19	1
					4934	16	2

1722 Debtors Diſcharged
1090 Wives
3002 Children

5814 Souls benefited; Beſides the Advantages derived from this Charity by the ſeveral Creditors, many of whom were in very neceſſitous Circumſtances.

N. B. The Sum expended is at an Average about £.2. 13s. 8d. for each Debtor, including EVERY EXPENCE incidental to the Charity.

Per Contra. Creditor.

1772.

		Debtors.	Wives.	Children.	£.	s.	d.
March 11.	By the Discharge of						
May 27.	By — Ditto	—	51	89	—		
July 12.	By — Ditto	—	121	8	132	—	12
Nov. 28.	By — Ditto	—	58	23	04	—	101 18
Dec. 31.	By — Ditto	—	118	68	117	—	255 0 12

1773.

March 31.	By — Ditto	—	122	214	37	—	
June 30.	By — Ditto	—	253	185	49	—	
Sept. 30.	By — Ditto	—	150	97	263	—	356 5 7
Dec. 31.	By — Ditto	—	180	156	497	—	

1774.

March 30.	By — Ditto	—	192	132	389	—	472 7 02
			1722	1090	3008		

Balance —

1892 Souls benefited: Besides the Advantages derived from this Charity by the several Creditors, many of whom were in very necessitous circumstances.

N. B. The Sum expended in Average about £3 1s. 0d. each Debtor, including every Expence incidental to the Compromise.